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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6604
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0189
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1481
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0371
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0251
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1963
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0806
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0175

S E C R E T TUNIS 000516

SIPDIS

NEA/MAG; INR/B

EO 12958 DECL: 02/28/2017
TAGS PREL, PTER, PGOV, PINR, ENRG, EAID, TS
SUBJECT: TUNISIA: DINNER WITH SAKHER EL MATERI

REF: TUNIS 338

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (S) The Ambassador and his wife had dinner with Mohammad Sakher El Materi and his wife, Nesrine Ben Ali El Materi, at their Hammamet home J

The ACST Situation

¶2. (S) Presidential son-in-law and wealthy businessman Mohamed Sakher El Materi, and his wife, Nesrine Ben Ali El Materi hosted the Ambassador

Freedom of Expression

¶3. (S) Ambassador raised the need for more freedom of expression and association in Tunisia. El Materi agreed. He complained that, as the new

¶4. (S) El Materi said it was important to help others, noting that was one reason he had adopted a son. The Ambassador mentioned the Embassy's

¶5. (S) El Materi complained at length about Tunisian bureaucracy, saying it is difficult to get things done. He said communication inside the

On Exterior Politics and Economics

¶6. (S) El Materi praised President Barack Obama's new policies. He said the invasion of Iraq was a very serious US mistake that had strengthen

¶7. (S) The Ambassador raised economic liberalization, noting the importance of opening up to franchising. El Materi agreed, noting that he wou

¶8. (S) The Ambassador noted he has been asking Tunisians what ideas they have for the new US President and Administration. El Materi commented

Islam

¶9. (S) El Materi said he had begun to practice Islam seriously at 17. He repeatedly said he was practicing, and had a strong faith. (NB. He we

¶10. (S) El Materi said he was proud of Zeitouna radio, the first and only Tunisian Koranic radio station, and discussed how Zeitouna bank woul

El-Materi Unplugged: Home/Personal Life

¶11. (S) El-Materi's house is spacious, and directly above and along the Hammamet public beach. The compound is large and well guarded by gover

¶12. (S) The dinner included perhaps a dozen dishes, including fish, steak, turkey, octopus, fish couscous and much more. The quantity was suff

¶13. (S) El Materi has a large tiger ("Pasha") on his compound, living in a cage. He acquired it when it was a few weeks old. The tiger consume

¶14. (S) They have three children, two girls and a boy. Leila is four and another daughter that is about 10 months. Their boy is adopted and is

¶15. (S) El Materi said he has begun an exercise and diet regime. He has, he said, recently lost weight (it was visibly true). El Materi said t

¶16. (S) Both El Materi and Nesrine speak English, although their vocabulary and grammar are limited. They are clearly eager to strengthen thei

Comment

¶17. (S) Throughout the evening, El Materi often struck the Ambassador as demanding, vain and difficult. He is clearly aware of his wealth and

¶18. (S) El Materi, in recent months, has been ever more visible in the local diplomatic community. He has clearly decided (or been told) to se

¶19. (S) Most striking of all, however, was the opulence with which El Materi and Nesrine live. Their home in Hammamet was impressive, with the

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